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Sustainable development: follow-up to and implementation of the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States

Promoting an integrated management approach to the Caribbean Sea area in the context of sustainable development

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The General Assembly, in its resolution 59/230, called on the United Nations system and the international community to support the efforts of the Caribbean Member States and their regional organizations to ensure the protection of the Caribbean Sea from degradation due to pollution from ships, illegal dumping or accidental release of hazardous waste and dangerous chemicals and pollution from land-based activities. It also invited the Association of Caribbean States, the regional organization principally charged with monitoring the management of the Caribbean Sea to submit to the Secretary-General a report on its progress, for consideration at the sixty-first session of the Assembly.

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 59/230. The report of the Association of Caribbean States is contained in the annex. The report gives an account of activities undertaken at the national and regional levels with a view to adopting an integrated management approach to the Caribbean Sea in the context of sustainable development.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 59/230 on promoting an integrated management approach to the Caribbean Sea area in the context of sustainable development, the General Assembly called upon Member States to continue to prioritize action on marine pollution from land-based sources as part of their national sustainable development strategies and programmes in an integrated and inclusive manner, and also called on them to advance the implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (A/51/116, annex II) and the Montreal Declaration on the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (E/CN.17/2002/PC.2/15, annex, sect. 1). The United Nations system and the international community was called on to support the efforts of Caribbean countries and their regional organizations to ensure the protection of the Caribbean Sea from degradation as a result of pollution from ships, illegal dumping or accidental release of hazardous waste and dangerous chemicals.

2. The Association of Caribbean States (ACS) in particular was charged with further implementation of General Assembly resolutions 55/203 and 57/261, with the support of the international community. The Association was invited to submit a report on its progress to the Secretary-General. In its resolution 59/230, the General Assembly also urged the United Nations system and the international community to continue to assist the countries of the Caribbean region in the implementation of their long-term programmes of disaster prevention, preparedness, mitigation, management, relief and recovery.

3. The following Member States and organizations reported on activities undertaken in implementation of General Assembly resolution 59/230: Barbados, Guatemala, Japan, Mexico, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), ACS, the subregional headquarters for the Caribbean of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Caribbean Office of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

4. An integrated management approach to the Caribbean Sea area in the context of sustainable development embraces interdisciplinary environmental, social and economic, legal and institutional elements that must be combined in a strategy for the effective management and protection of the marine resources of the Caribbean. Such management, to be effective, must necessarily be pursued at both the national and regional level, with particular regard to the environmental and safety aspects of shipping; pollution monitoring and assessment; control of pollution from land-based resources; development of common methodologies for integrated coastal management; conservation of biological diversity; exploitation of fisheries and other marine resources; exploitation of non-living resources; information and data exchange; security; and international and regional cooperation and coordination.

5. An account of the activities undertaken to promote and support comprehensive management of the resources of the Caribbean Sea during the period under review is given below.

II. Activities undertaken at the regional and national level

A. Regional activities

6. ACS, the organization charged by the member States of the wider Caribbean region with overall responsibility for implementation of the Caribbean Sea initiative, held its fourth summit in Panama in July 2005. During the summit, ACS member States reiterated that the Caribbean Sea is a common patrimony and pledged to continue working towards its recognition by the United Nations as a special area in the context of sustainable development. During the period under review, ACS continued to undertake a variety of activities through concerted action in the areas of trade, transport, sustainable tourism and natural disasters in the greater Caribbean. The report of ACS, prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 59/230, is attached (see annex).

7. The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO, through its Sub-Commission for the Caribbean and Adjacent Regions, has developed a series of projects and programmes, including a project on the sustainable management of the shared living marine resources of the Caribbean large marine ecosystem, with an emphasis on governance of transboundary living marine resources. The project will be co-financed by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), which has committed $700,000 to the region. IOC has also contributed to the expansion of existing integrated coastal management capacities in Latin America and the Caribbean through the development and application of action-oriented approaches to coastal policy and management.

8. At its 23rd assembly, IOC adopted a resolution which called for the establishment of the IOC intergovernmental coordination group for the tsunami and other coastal hazards warning system for the Caribbean Sea and adjacent regions. The coordination group held its first session in Barbados from 10 to 12 January 2006 and adopted a series of recommendations to provide guidance to all partners regarding the required actions needed to establish the tsunami warning system.

9. UNEP has been implementing various projects and activities on land-based sources of marine pollution, including a GEF project on integrating management of watersheds and coastal areas in small island developing States in the Caribbean in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Caribbean Environmental Health Institute. The project includes components addressing coastal area management and biodiversity, tourism development, protection of water supplies, land-based sources of pollution and climate change. UNEP is also implementing, in collaboration with UNDP, a GEF project that provides training and assistance for the rehabilitation of contaminated bays, including through two regional training workshops in 2004 and 2005 on the management of nutrients and sewage sludge. A regional knowledge-sharing workshop will be held in late 2006. The outputs of the workshop will support the Second Overview of Land-based Sources and Activities in the Wider Caribbean Region, currently being undertaken to assess pollution loads in the Caribbean Sea.

10. The UNEP Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities and the UNEP regional offices undertook joint missions to Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, St. Lucia and Barbados in May 2005 to provide specific recommendations on how to incorporate long-term

sustainable financing into national programmes of action. Efforts led to the signing of a memorandum of understanding with the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) on the promotion of the implementation of national programmes of action in the framework of national environmental management strategies. In addition, the 15th Forum of Ministers of the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean was held in Caracas from 31 October to 7 November 2005. This meeting addressed a number of issues concerning the Caribbean Sea and approved the creation of a regional action plan as an instrument for the implementation of the Latin American and Caribbean Initiative for Sustainable Development.

11. During the period under review, the subregional headquarters for the Caribbean of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean completed a study on yachting in nine selected Caribbean countries, looking at various aspects of the industry, including type of vessels, the economic contribution to the countries, employment generated, best practices, social and environmental impacts and the possibility of adopting a regional policy and strategy. The study indicated that in many instances the yachting sector generated more income than the cruise ship industry and highlighted the potential economic and social benefits of the yachting industry in the Caribbean, with possibilities of mitigating its environmental impacts.

12. The CARICOM secretariat has been involved in various initiatives, including the Caribbean Sea Ecosystem Assessment, which assesses the ecological state of the Caribbean Sea for 33 member States of the wider Caribbean region. The assessment is carried out in cooperation with a number of intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations. A Caribbean Vegetation and Landcover Mapping Initiative is also being implemented with the collaboration of the Nature Conservancy, the United States Geological Survey and the Earth Resources Observation and Science Data Centre. Pilot projects for method development in land use and land cover classification are currently under way in Jamaica, Puerto Rico and Dominica. In addition, individual Caribbean States have launched a number of projects to protect coral reefs and beaches and marine and coastal zones.

13. FAO has been operating the Responsible Fisheries for Small Island Developing States project since 2002 as a component of FishCode, the FAO Programme of Global Partnerships for Responsible Fisheries. The project aims at strengthening the capacity of small island developing States' fisheries administrations to promote and facilitate responsible fisheries in support of social and economic development. It is expected that institutional strengthening and national capacity-building will result in enhanced conservation and management of exclusive economic zone fisheries and an increased economic role for national fisheries industries, including the privatization of fisheries investment where appropriate. The implementation of fisheries conservation and management arrangements that reduce fishing efforts in inshore areas, and the relocation of some fishers to near-shore and off-shore fisheries will greatly contribute to the sustainability of fisheries in the Caribbean Sea.

14. During the period under review, ITU, in coordination with the International Maritime Organization (IMO), organized in Antigua and Barbuda a workshop on the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS) at the request of countries concerned by the non-implementation of GMDSS in the Caribbean region mainly due to lack of resources. The workshop examined the status of GMDSS

implementation and provided an opportunity for Caribbean countries to decide on implementation modalities and to exchange views with manufacturers who provided countries with costing options and cost-effective means of implementation. In addition, the Government of France agreed to provide technical assistance and appropriate equipment for ships.

B. National activities

15. The Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism was established by a decision of the Conference of Heads of Government of CARICOM to address the need for a common fisheries policy and regime in the region. The Mechanism is intended to manage resources, promote cooperation among member States in research and provide technical support for fisheries projects in the region, with a view to ensuring sustainable harvesting.

16. In the field of disaster management, the Government of Barbados is currently pursuing a comprehensive disaster management policy framework. The Barbados disaster management mechanism is being re-engineered to develop and complement existing programmes, with greater emphasis being placed on addressing marine and coastal threats. Barbados is also involved in disaster response in the context of the work of the Caribbean Disaster Emergence Response Agency, which provides a framework for a coordinated response to disasters and/or emergencies in its participating States.

17. Barbados has incorporated within its disaster management mechanism a Standing Committee on Coastal Hazards as a planning framework for the protection of coastal communities. The Standing Committee has recently engaged in discussions with the United States Geological Service for the establishment of an early warning system for the detection of seismic threats and tsunamis in the region. This collaboration will see the establishment of a seismic monitoring system and buoys being placed in the Caribbean Sea. The effort has been spearheaded by the Barbados Coastal Zone Management Unit and the Central Emergency Relief Organisation of Barbados. The Organisation has commenced the process of developing a coastal evacuation plan for Barbados.

18. Barbados also contributes annually $30,000 to the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre, which was officially opened in August 2005 in Belmopan. The Centre coordinates the Caribbean region's response to climate change and is the key node for information on climate change issues and on the region's response to managing and adapting to climate change in the Caribbean. In addition, Barbados is currently involved in the Mainstreaming Adaptation to Global Change project, located in Belize. The project is a continuation of the Caribbean Planning for Adaptation to Climate Change project, which was based in Barbados and concluded in 2001. Under the Mainstreaming Adaptation to Global Change project, Barbados is undertaking a vulnerability and adaptation project focusing on the tourism sector.

19. Barbados will also participate in the GEF-funded pilot project on climate change and health, which seeks to mainstream climate change issues into the national development agenda. The study will seek to identify mechanisms to enable the health sector to adapt and put measures in place to address the negative effects expected from climate change. Barbados is also addressing technology issues as it relates to climate change adaptation, through funds from UNDP.

20. In the area of coastal zone management and conservation, Barbados is currently undertaking a coastal infrastructure programme to improve management and conservation of the coastal zone. The programme comprises a range of coastal management initiatives including shoreline stabilization and erosion control; restoration of coastal habitats; improvement of public coastal access; and institutional strengthening for coastal management.

21. The Government of Japan continues to assist CARICOM countries through a variety of projects in the field of environment, disaster mitigation and sustainable development for fisheries. Of note is a project that aims at strengthening the Caribbean Fisheries Training and Development Institute through capacity-building.

22. Mexico continues to undertake routine inspection of ships that transport hazardous wastes in the Gulf of Mexico and to be active in the field of environmental protection in the region, including through the implementation in 2005 of a pilot project aimed at the protection of the marine environment from land-based activities on the Yucatan peninsula. Mexico has recently published national guidelines for environmental management and the protection of natural resources.

23. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is actively involved in bilateral projects in the Caribbean Sea area, in support of environmental protection from pollution from land and sea-based activities. In the area of biodiversity, the United Kingdom is financing three projects in Trinidad and Tobago, Dominica and Guyana under the Darwin Initiative, which assist countries in the implementation of their obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity. Additionally, the Government of the United Kingdom continues to work through IMO to promote consideration of a full range of technical, methodological and market-based options for controlling maritime transport emissions of greenhouse gases, particularly carbon dioxide, as part of its commitment to article 2.2 of the Kyoto Protocol.

III. Conclusions

24. The United Nations system and the wider international community will continue to follow the lead of ACS, in accordance with the decisions of the member States of the Caribbean region and relevant resolutions of the General Assembly.

25. In this regard, it is noted that the first meeting of the Follow-Up Commission for the Caribbean Sea Initiative was held in Trinidad and Tobago on 27 July 2006. The convening of this meeting is the result of a decision taken by the ACS ministers in March 2006 to devise a work programme to implement the Caribbean Sea Initiative in a more meaningful way. The new Commission will replace the Technical Advisory Group on the Caribbean Sea established in 2003, which was limited to an advisory role. The Commission has been established as a multidisciplinary, intergovernmental agency with a more practical, action-oriented mandate. With its creation, the international community anticipates a more dynamic, coordinated approach to the management of the Caribbean Sea.

Annex

Report of the Association of Caribbean States

1. The proposal for promoting an integrated management approach to the Caribbean Sea area in the context of sustainable development stems from a decision taken at a meeting of Caribbean ministers on the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. The original proposal made at this Ministerial Meeting was to foster international recognition of the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development, recognizing, inter alia, that, for signatory States, article 57 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea placed large oceanic spaces under the jurisdiction of coastal States.

2. Most Association of Caribbean States (ACS) member States, particularly small island developing States, have jurisdiction over maritime spaces, in many cases larger than their land areas, for which they lack the resources to safeguard their rights, exercise jurisdiction and manage natural resources in a sustainable manner. These challenges led ACS to seek a multilateral framework in which such States could face their rights and obligations, by proposing a draft declaration entitled "Declaration of the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development" by the United Nations General Assembly. This was, in fact, the title of the original draft tabled.

3. By leaving out the reference to the recognition of the special area as put forward in the title of the original draft, there is a loss, at least in the operational part of the resolutions, of acceptance by the international community that the Caribbean Sea is a fragile, semi-enclosed ecosystem shared by many countries and territories of different sizes, populations, economic development and special needs, which depend on this semi-enclosed Sea[a] for the achievement of their sustainable development.

4. ACS is involved in the regional coordinating mechanism agreed within the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee/Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean in 2006 for the implementation of the Mauritius Strategy for the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. The regional coordinating mechanism will be entrusted with coordinating initiatives in the Caribbean region with a view to the removal of fragmentation at the national and regional levels.

5. The fourth ACS summit, held in July 2005, reiterated that the Caribbean Sea is a common patrimony and pledged to continue working towards its recognition by the United Nations as a special area in the context of sustainable development. In the declaration, the Heads of Government and State also:

- Instructed the Ministerial Council to permanently include this topic on its agenda with a view to ensuring the formulation and coordination of a

[a] The Greater Caribbean region satisfies the requirements of article 122 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and can be described as a semi-enclosed sea. It consists of several deep basins separated by major sills. The two major basins are the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico.

negotiating strategy to be analysed and approved by the ministers of foreign affairs

- Instructed the Ministerial Council to coordinate with other regional initiatives, when appropriate, actions necessary to conserve the natural resources of the Greater Caribbean region

- Proposed to take into account the elements of General Assembly resolution 59/230 on promoting an integrated management approach to the Caribbean Sea area in the context of sustainable development

- Supported the efforts of the secretary-general of ACS to contribute to the deliberations held with the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, the Group of 77 and our partners from developed countries

- Welcomed the Declaration of Mauritius adopted during the International Meeting to Review the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, held in Mauritius in January 2005, which reaffirms the need to work actively in favour of promoting the sustainable development of this group of especially vulnerable countries, for which international cooperation continues to be an essential factor

- Reaffirmed their commitment to strengthen cooperation and coordination among the party and signatory States of treaties establishing denuclearized zones, particularly among Caribbean States and in this respect, highlight the convening of the Conference of States Parties and Signatories to Treaties That Establish Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones, held in Mexico City, from 26 to 28 April 2005, which served as a valuable opportunity for accomplishing this objective

- Reaffirmed the position adopted at the 3rd Summit of Heads of State and/or Government of ACS, held in Margarita Island, Venezuela, at which we reiterated our strenuous and forceful rejection of the continued use of the Caribbean Sea for the shipment and trans-shipment of nuclear material and toxic waste, given the threat that any accidental or deliberately induced spill of these materials would represent to the life and ecosystem of the region

- Called upon the countries that produce nuclear and toxic waste to implement urgently relevant measures to establish reprocessing facilities that would put an end to the need for transhipments of this nuclear and toxic waste

- Without prejudice to the foregoing, recognized the international obligations of ACS members, particularly those that have obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and relevant instruments of the International Maritime Organization

- Urged those countries currently involved in production or shipment of nuclear waste to adopt measures aimed at strengthening international cooperation in order to comply with security measures on the transportation of radioactive material, especially those adopted at the 47th General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency held in Austria in 2003

6. The decision taken by the Summit established a high-level intra-Caribbean forum for consultation and concerted action towards this common goal and

reiterated to the international community the political will of the Greater Caribbean region to pursue the Caribbean Sea Initiative.

7. The reference to the Mauritius Strategy is particularly important since, according to that document, small island developing States and relevant regional and international development partners should work together to develop and implement regional initiatives to promote the sustainable conservation and management of coastal and marine resources including, inter alia, the designation of the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development.

8. The eleventh ordinary meeting of the ACS Ministerial Council, held on 28 March 2006, created the Follow-Up Commission for the Caribbean Sea Initiative. The mandate of this body, which will report to the Ministerial Council, will be to develop the strategic planning and technical follow-up work for the advancement of the Caribbean Sea Initiative and to formulate a practical and action-oriented work programme for the further development and implementation of the Initiative.

Natural disasters

9. The adverse impact of disasters, which are visited upon our region with increasing frequency and severity, if left unchecked, will continue to have dire consequences for the sustainable development of the region and calls for the urgent establishment of a legal framework that promotes cooperation for the prevention and management of disasters. The ACS Agreement for Regional Cooperation on Natural Disasters was signed in 1999.

10. ACS is also deeply involved in the project to create a small island developing State Caribbean weather service production system, which aims at developing an automated weather service production system in the Caribbean Area. The ACS Secretary-General is Chairman of the Supervisory Board for this project funded by the Government of Finland.

11. The Association is working on a programme for the prevention and mitigation of the effects and recuperation from natural disasters, which seeks to develop a preliminary programme of action that analyses the authorities of ACS member countries, specialized organizations and the different realities that interact periodically in the region in the event of natural disasters.

12. ACS will soon implement the initiative to hold workshops to create national post-disaster funds, with cooperation from the Government of Argentina, which will allow the exchange of experiences and define the process to be followed in order to establish national post-disaster funds. Though the initiative to create a regional post-disaster fund has proven elusive, ACS has produced a compact disc which contains a "map" of existing post-disaster financing mechanisms.

13. A seminar entitled "Seminar-workshop for national authorities: risk management policies, systems and experiences in the Greater Caribbean" was held in Havana as a result of the valuable cooperation received from two ACS observer countries (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Turkey) with the objective of exchanging knowledge on risk and disaster management, strengthening trade and cooperation and developing further alliances between the countries and institutions of the region, with support from the United Nations,

cooperation agencies and other regional initiatives, such as ACS. The workshop also enjoyed significant support from the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, the Pan American Health Organization and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), to name a few.

14. The most tangible and valuable result of the seminar-workshop was the outcome document entitled "The Havana consensus". Documentation arising out of this seminar-workshop has been placed on CD-ROM, which will be distributed and made available to all delegations. This CD-ROM is yet another product offered to the international community by ACS with respect to this topic.

15. Mention must also be made of the recent unveiling at ACS headquarters of the radio soap opera on natural disasters in the Caribbean. This series, entitled "The rough season", is based on successful experiences in Central America, was created in collaboration with the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the Pan American Health Organization and ISDR and seeks to sensitize the general public by increasing and promoting the knowledge of the audience in the area of natural disasters, thus improving the attitude towards disasters, and fostering preparation and mitigation efforts at the community level in the English-speaking Caribbean.

16. Finally, the Transport and Natural Disasters Directorate has started working on a major programme to hold a high-level three-day regional conference in 2007 to exchange experiences, lessons learned and best practices in the areas of risk reduction and natural disaster mitigation and recovery in the region, with a view to determining intraregional cooperation areas and programmes in both fields in order to strengthen national and regional preparedness. The conference would also examine the possibilities of establishing regional mechanisms in the framework of the ACS Agreement for Regional Cooperation on Natural Disasters, the Hyogo Framework for Action, ISDR and the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

17. The ACS Agreement for Regional Cooperation on Natural Disasters of 17 April 1999 has been signed by 25 member States and two associate members of ACS. This instrument has received 10 ratifications and requires 17 for its entry into force.

Transport

18. The ACS policy entitled "Unite the Caribbean by air and sea" addresses the dramatic situation of air transport in the region and led the Association to negotiate its Air Transport Agreement to offer the legal framework to provide a variety of air service options, while ensuring the highest degree of operational safety and security in international civil aviation and tackling the urgent need for a general aviation policy for the Greater Caribbean by which Members may be guided in their aviation arrangements for a wider choice of routes, carriers and improved services.

19. ACS also realized early on the urgency of addressing the current situation of our maritime shipping infrastructure and other arrangements, as well as the lack of

knowledge regarding available services and existing regulations which, taken together, have led to the unhealthy situation in which ports such as Houston are considered major "Caribbean" hubs.

20. The implementation and operation of an Integrated Technological Platform for the generation of services to optimize logistics and transport operations and facilitate regional and extra-regional trade will set up a single regional trade system to support all aspects of this endeavour and its development in the smaller economies of many of our member States and thus unify the essential services of interregional and international trade, ensuring that necessary competitive capacity exists. The initiative is part of a wider, more ambitious project of eventually setting up a regional trade centre.

21. Caribbean ports do not lack overall capacity, nor is the number of carriers insufficient for present needs. Instead, harmonized regulatory and legal reform is needed to create incentives to improve administrative practices, stimulate investment to modernize existing facilities, and ensure efficient pooling of resources in this area. Improved data collection and dissemination is urgently needed. To address this issue, ACS is working on the development of an Internet-based Port and Maritime Database to monitor performance and allow inter-port comparisons, by providing statistical information on infrastructure, shipping services and cargo movement in the region.

22. Recognizing that there is currently no harmonious maritime port system to facilitate intra-regional trade, the Maritime-Port Network aims at economic and trade integration, preserving the environment and conserving natural resources by increasing the interaction among the States to promote the sustainable development of the Greater Caribbean by modernizing and adjusting maritime infrastructure to suit the needs of consumption centres and international demands.

23. There are other projects, either completed or under way, such as the creation of a Bank of Problems and Solutions for Maritime Port Activities, the Coordinating Centre for Research, Consultation and Training, the Map of Current Maritime Routes in the Greater Caribbean, and the Greater Caribbean Electronic Highway. Special mention should also be made of the Scholarship Programme of the Caribbean Maritime University in Venezuela, aimed at raising the effectiveness of the transport sector in member countries through improved training of the human resources of the region.

24. The fourth ACS summit, held in Panama City, in July 2005, approved a proposal by the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Patrick Manning, on the need to adopt a mechanism to follow up the priority issues on the ACS agenda through the creation of the Presidential Consultation Group, which will follow up the priority topics on the ACS agenda. The summit also agreed that the work of the new Group would focus initially on the ACS transport agenda.

25. It must also be pointed out that during the fourth extraordinary meeting of the ACS Ministerial Council, held on the eve of the summit, it was agreed that the Secretariat would be asked to prepare a proposal on the creation of a mechanism to follow up the transportation of toxic waste and radioactive material through the Caribbean Sea.

26. The Air Transport Agreement among ACS member States and associate members, of 12 February 2004, has, to date, been signed by 13 member States and

one associate member and has received six ratifications. This instrument requires nine ratifications for its entry into force.

Sustainable tourism

27. The ACS convention establishing the sustainable tourism zone of the Caribbean creates the first such zone in the world by providing quantifiable criteria and a mechanism for certifying specific destinations. The objective of the sustainable tourism zone of the Caribbean is to establish a geographically determined cultural, socio-economic and biologically rich and diverse unit in which tourism development will depend on sustainability as internationally understood. Once ratified, the Convention will afford member States the opportunity to develop and coordinate strategies in areas such as community participation and profit in tourism, the environment, technologies for sustainability, tourism economic policies and instruments, tourist markets, indicators of sustainability in tourism, air and maritime access for tourism, and public and private sector collaboration, among others.

28. Other important sustainable tourism activities are described below.

Foreign language training project

29. The initial project has been reformulated as the foreign language training programme, and projects have been identified to develop the other components of the programme, such as the establishment of a centre for the promotion of languages and cultures of the Greater Caribbean and a network of centres of excellence for language training.

Development and promotion of multidestination tourism in the greater Caribbean and the convening of a forum of airline and tourism executives

30. A forum of airline and tourism executives to promote multidestination tourism in Caribbean countries, a vital component of this project, was held in Martinique from 27 to 29 November 2005, under the auspices of the Regional Council of Martinique. The forum resulted in practical recommendations for promoting the development of multidestination packages by carrier companies (both air and maritime), tourism operators, accommodation facilities and government agencies.

Regional network for tourist safety and security

31. One member State has indicated its intention to convene, in 2006, a conference on tourist safety and security, similar to the conference conducted in Trinidad and Tobago in 2003, for the purpose of sharing experiences with the non-English-speaking member States and associate Members. Collaboration between the ACS and the Caribbean Hotel Association has resulted in preliminary approval for a tourist safety project to be financed by the programme and ProInvest of the European Union, which will benefit the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Antigua and Barbuda and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Protection of coastal ecosystems as the basis for sustainable tourism development

32. The Secretariat has continued coordination efforts with the Caribbean Environmental Health Institute and the Caribbean Environment Programme of the United Nations Environment Programme, co-executing agencies of the project entitled "Integrating watershed and coastal area management in small island developing States of the Caribbean". Meetings have also been held with the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute regarding the implementation of its project on integrating watershed and coastal area management, entitled "Who pays for water?" The objective is to identify opportunities for preparing joint project proposals and extending the initiatives focusing on benefiting those ACS members who are not current beneficiaries.

33. The convention establishing the sustainable tourism zone of the Caribbean of 12 December 2001 has, to date, been signed by 25 member States and one associate member and has received five ratifications. This instrument requires 15 ratifications for its entry into force.

Trade

34. The Business Forum of the Greater Caribbean, held in Guadeloupe, stands out as an ACS initiative that, in coordination with the trade promotion organizations of the region, seeks to promote trade through the coordination of business meetings over a two-day period, providing valuable opportunities for visiting exporters and importers to develop intra-Caribbean business opportunities. More than 1,200 ACS entrepreneurs have attended the event in the past 5 years and the latest forum, held in the Dominican Republic, managed to secure and initial $5,000,000 in business in just one day.

35. The project on the coordination of positions of member States in international negotiations at the World Trade Organization level with respect to the treatment of small economies will facilitate the discussion on the nature and scope of the special and differential treatment to be granted to countries in different trade agreements and on the various measures that could be employed for its implementation and guidelines.

36. ACS is in the process of formulating a project on the vulnerabilities of economies and special and differential treatment and on the preparation of studies and development of activities on the issue of special and differential treatment. ACS is also working to ensure adequate representation of its members at World Trade Organization negotiations by promoting training in international trade negotiations by facilitating the training processes for negotiators in the region and promoting the exchange of knowledge and ideas among the negotiators of the region, through relevant activities associated with specific trade issues.

37. The Committee organized a meeting on the facilitation of customs procedures in the Greater Caribbean, which was financed by the Ministry of Trade and Industry of Trinidad and Tobago. Representatives of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Inter-American Center of Tax Administrators and the Latin American Association of Express Delivery Companies were invited to the meeting. As the main theme of the meeting, a presentation was delivered on the regional customs programme that was executed by the Inter-American Center of Tax Administrators

in conjunction with IDB. Participants had the opportunity to learn in detail the results of the programme, its scope of application and the action to be taken. The report of the meeting was presented during the seventeenth meeting of the Special Committee on Trade.

38. The Secretariat, together with Guadeloupe, organized the sixth Forum of Trade Promotion Organizations and the sixth Business Forum of the Greater Caribbean, which were held in Point-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe, from 5 to 7 October 2005. Three coordination meetings were convened, the first of which, held in February, was attended by the trade adviser. The trip to Guadeloupe was financed by the Regional Council. On that occasion, the experience of previous forums was shared with the organizers and there was a joint effort to outline the programme of preparatory activities for the event, as well as the establishment of working groups.

39. The Secretariat is currently developing, in cooperation with other regional organizations, a study on special and differential treatment of small economies describing the measures currently being implemented and their impacts in each of the regional integration agreements in the Greater Caribbean.